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C I R C U L A R .

DEAR BROTHER :—Although but too well aware of the many and pressing claims upon your attention, sympathy, and effort, we feel constrained to interpose another subject, important in itself and in its relations to the Church, the State, and our responsibilities as members of the body politic.

On the 20th of Dec., 1858, a company of ministers met at the house of one of the pastors in the city of Worcester, to consider the aspects of the Slavery question, *and its relations to the Churches of the North*. After a full and frank interchange of opinions, it was voted to invite a larger number of ministers and members to meet in conference, and, if deemed expedient, inaugurate an organized movement, which should aim, not simply to remove slavery itself, but to place the Church in its true position in relation to this great problem of our land and age. Such a conference was holden at Worcester, on the 1st and 2nd inst., and resulted in the formation of a new association, to be called "The Church Anti-Slavery Society of the United States," which adopted a constitution, chose its officers, and, after a full discussion, agreed upon the following

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

I.—The rights of man as man sacred and inalienable, without distinction of blood or races.

II.—Property in man impossible, as being without grant from the Creator, and equally contrary to natural justice and to revealed religion.

III.—The system of American slavery and the practice of slave-holding essentially sinful and anti-Christian, and to be dealt with, therefore, as such, by Christian churches and ministers.

IV.—The utter inadequacy and impossibility of any remedy or relief from slavery, but one that insists upon its inherent wrongfulness, its total intrinsic baseness, and denies absolutely the wild and guilty fantasy that man can have property in man!

V.—The duty of one family or section of the Christian church to rebuke and refuse fellowship to another section of the visible church, that denies the rights of

man and the common brotherhood of humanity, by defending slavery and folding to its bosom slave sellers, slave buyers and slaveholders.

VI.—No compromise with slavery allowable, but its total extinction to be demanded at once, in the name of God, who has commanded: "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens; and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke."

VII.—The total abolition of the vast system of American slavery to be accepted as the providential mission and duty of the American clergy and the American churches of this generation.

VIII.—The church and the ministry to form the conscience of the nation in respect to slavery, and to make it loyal to the law of God, against all unjust judgments of courts, and unrighteous legislation of Congress.

IX.—The Word of God our charter for freedom and our armory against slavery, and any assertion that the Lord God sanctions slavery, practical infidelity.

X.—Ultimate success sure, in the warfare with oppression, to a faithful ministry and witnessing church.

CONSTITUTION.

ARTICLE 1. The object of this association being to unite all Christians on the basis of the Word of God against slavery, and to concentrate the energies of the Christian ministry and of Christian churches upon the extinction of that great sin, the conditions of membership shall be the adoption of its pledge and principles, and the payment of an annual contribution for its support. And members of local societies formed on these principles shall be members in full of this society.

ART. 2. The officers of this society shall be a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, auditor, and an executive committee of five, to be chosen annually by ballot.

ART. 3. The duties of the officers and committee shall be to provide for and call public meetings at such times and places as they see fit, in order to advocate the principles of the society, to mould public opinion, to induce action by the churches with reference to slavery, and to inculcate the duties of civil government, of civil rulers, and of citizens, in respect to its overthrow.

ART. 4. Beside local and extraordinary meetings, which may be called at the discretion of the officers and committee, there shall be at least one public meeting annually, during the religious anniversary week, in the cities of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, for the free expression of the anti-slavery principle and sentiment of Christian churches, as declared by this society.

ART. 5. The expenses incurred by the officers of this society, in the prosecution of their duties, by the maintenance of public meetings, lectures, and the use of the Press, shall be met by the resources derived from the annual contributions of members, and by such donations as benevolent individuals and churches shall bestow for the uses of the society.

ART. 6. This constitution may be amended by a vote of two-thirds of the members present at any meeting, notice of said amendment having been given at any previous meeting.

The following resolutions were adopted with the above constitution:

Resolved, In consideration of honest differences of opinion among anti-slavery Christians in regard to the Bible view of slavery; their relation to slaveholding churches and those ecclesiastical bodies and benevolent societies that embrace or tolerate such, as also their duties to the civil government, that the Executive committee be instructed to diffuse such information and discussions through the periodical press, and by means of *tracts*, as in their judgment shall seem desirable; and that they also confer with the American Tract Society at Boston in relation to the publication of such tracts as may be procured for these purposes.

Resolved, That the Executive Committee be instructed to call the attention of the various associations, of the different Evangelical denominations, in sympathy with this movement, to the objects of this society, with the request, that they shall recommend to the ministers and churches in their connections, to form local societies according to the plan proposed in the above constitution, Art. I.

Resolved, That the Executive Committee, as soon as they are justified by the state of the treasury, be requested to employ public lecturers to explain and defend the principles of the society, and promote the general purposes for which it has been formed.

Having perfected these preliminary arrangements, we would now respectfully and earnestly invite you to be present at our first annual meeting, which is to be holden in the city of Boston, on Tuesday the 24th of May, next, at the Tremont Temple, at 2 o'clock P. M., to join in the movement now inaugurated, and to co-operate in considering and deciding upon the practical measures that may be deemed necessary to carry into effect the principles and purposes of our organization.

Presuming, however, on your very natural wish to know the *reasons* of our movement, what encouragement we find for effort, and the plans we propose to adopt, we will briefly yet frankly set forth some of the considerations which have moved us to make this attempt.

1. We would combine and give expression to the existing anti-slavery sentiment of the churches. We are convinced that there is no inconsiderable amount of such opinion and feeling in them, which lies practically dormant, either from an overshadowing influence, that prevents its full exhibition, or because there is no organized form, through which such sentiments may be promulgated or made effective. Large numbers, with warm sympathy for the down trodden, longing desires for their deliverance, and deep indignation at the cruelty and craft of their oppressors, yet, being isolated, and without mutual countenance and support, are compelled to repress these feelings and leave without effective utterance their profound abhorrence of the fearful system of American chattel slavery. In this society

we would open a channel through which such sympathy can flow such testimony be uttered, and the needed effort be put forth.

2. We would provide an agency for the dissemination of correct principles, not only upon the general subject of slavery, but upon those special forms of danger and duty, which the present exigencies of the cause present. By the aid of the periodical press, tracts and larger treatises, it is believed that correct views can be promulgated, and many, who are now undecided and inactive, may be secured to the service of freedom, and persuaded to enter the ranks of earnest and practical opponents of oppression. There are earnest thinkers, acute and able pens, and hearts glowing with zeal, and burning with anxious desire to break the shackles not merely of the bondmen of the South, but of the still fettered and enthralled North—of those, in our churches, who yet inquire: What have *we* to do with slavery? We would furnish facilities and means by which their

“Thoughts that breathe and words that burn,”

shall reach the masses, and call into action much of the latent sensibility and piety, which are now lost to the cause of right and humanity. Such an agency may this Society become.

3. We would prepare the way and afford facilities for the full and fair consideration of many important practical points, concerning which there are still honest differences of opinion among earnest anti-slavery Christians—differences so decided as to embarrass, not to say prevent, all practical co-operation against the system, even among those who claim to be alike hostile to it. Of such mooted questions, we would cite the following: 1. What are the exact teachings of Scripture concerning Slavery? What was the real nature of Hebrew servitude? and what was the attitude of Christ and his disciples towards the slavery of their times? 2. What is our duty in relation to those ministers, churches, and benevolent societies, who still retain a seeming complicity with other churches and ecclesiastical bodies in which slaveholders are tolerated? And how can we absolve ourselves from such complicity, without becoming involved in the sin and unhappy position of modern *come-outerism*? 3. How shall Christians be enabled to make their influence felt in the politics of the state and nation, without compromising their principles, or weakening their moral influence over the minds of their fellow-citizens? These are questions concerning which there are honest differences of opinion, such differences as paralyze the energies of the church and hinder all effective opposition to the terri-

ble system we so heartily deplore and condemn. These questions should be thoroughly and honestly discussed, *not simply, as too often now, as matters of ethics merely*, but as involving *practical* issues, of infinite moment to ourselves as well as others, pertaining as really to the interests of Religion as Freedom. In the Society now formed, we think an agency is presented, which may be made greatly instrumental of promoting such discussions, and rendering practical the conclusions to which they lead.

4. Finally, WE WOULD PLACE THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN ITS TRUE POSITION. We would not merely absolve it from all complicity with American Slavery, but we would take away its reproach of remaining silent and inactive in the presence of this giant crime of the day. It is not fitting that the church should ignore her responsibilities in this matter. Her ministry and membership are neither honoring their Master nor promoting their own good report, by leaving this question—essentially a MORAL one, involving in all its parts the great principles of *right* and *wrong*, the duties we owe to God, our fellow-men, and our own souls—to be discussed and decided by sceptical reformers, made more sceptical by her remissness, or by politicians, looking at it merely as an element of party arrangement and zeal. Such a question is not safe in such hands. The issues involved are too momentous to be lodged exclusively with them, or with any political party, however correct, in the main, its principles and platform may be. Nor is it safe, or for the honor of the church, to allow such a question to be decided, even if it could be, by worldly men from worldly principles alone. For her own sake, her testimony should be unequivocal, and her position clearly defined. Her hold upon the confidence and conscience of the community requires it. If she would diminish the numbers who are yearly swelling the ranks of modern scepticism, she must change what seems to many the equivocal position she now occupies, upon this subject; and thus deprive Infidelity of one of its most effective weapons, and one that it is using with the most terrible success.

We are, by no means, unaware of the difficulties and discouragements, that suggest themselves, by the mere mention of a new anti-slavery movement—the objections which will be urged to such an organization as we propose—the doubts that will be started as to the *need* of such an effort, with the many ominous and desponding questions that will suggest themselves concerning it. “What do you propose to do?” is an inquiry that we frequently hear; and it is often propounded with a tone, indicative of no confidence in any

good results from it. Some are satisfied with things as they are; others are hopeless of any good from any source; some think the church has done all she is called upon to do, and that the rest must be left to the providence of God; others feel that the present apathy of our churches to the dangers and duties of our position, is but a certain symptom of judicial blindness, a paralysis of the nation's mind and heart, that shall never be healed, as it is but a sure precursor of coming ruin; while others still feel, whatever may be God's purpose or the actual results of efforts that we may make, that it is our duty to feel for them in bonds as bound with them, disown all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and use every legitimate means to rid the Christian church of all unrighteous connection with wrong.

Now we respectfully submit, whether such diversity of sentiment on the part of some, such apathy of feeling on the part of others, *and such persistent inaction on the part of all*, at least so far as any concerted effort is concerned, in the churches of the North, taken in connection with the notorious and astounding facts of Slavery and its advocates, do not afford reasons for an attempt to secure the prevalence of better counsels and the adoption of measures that shall, at least, indicate, that we see our dangers, and are willing to learn our duty. The strides of the Slave Power were never so rapid as now. The Government, in all its departments, legislative, executive and judicial, is fully and openly committed to the purpose of making slavery, no longer sectional, but *national*; requiring but one more decision of the Supreme Court to render it as legal in Massachusetts as in South Carolina. The Slave Trade is practically opened, with a growing determination, on the part of the South, to remove all legislative restrictions that hinder its open prosecution. Nor is the prospect more hopeful in the Southern *churches*. We talk familiarly of their "apostasy," and yet we still remain ecclesiastically and socially, as well as politically and commercially, very much as we were in the days of comparative darkness, and before this "apostasy" took place. Our national Benevolent Societies stand dumb before this inexorable Power, while its advocates and apologists yet retain their places in their counsels and boards of direction.

Is it not time then, is there not a demand for, at least, *conference* and *prayer* among those who see the wrong, and who would absolve themselves from all seeming countenance of so foul a scheme of cruelty and fraud? Is it not time, that Northern Christians should take counsel together and unite their prayers for heavenly wisdom; that they

may not only undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free, but that they may avert from themselves and their guilty land the judgment of Almighty God? Is it "righteousness" alone that exalteth a nation? Then how can our nation endure, occupying its present attitude, and pursuing its present course? And how can the American Church, with its more than three millions of members and *half a million of voters*, expect the divine blessing, if it stands silent and inactive, either through indifference or the fear of man? It recognizes the claims of a dying world, and, in form, has entered upon the vast and momentous undertaking of its evangelization. And yet how obvious the conclusion, that the perpetuity and prosperity of our free institutions are intimately, if not essentially, connected with the immediate success of the missionary enterprise. So that it is not alone for the slave, nor yet again for ourselves, but for the sake of nations lying in heathen darkness, that every friend of Christ should identify himself with the cause of Freedom in our land.

Do we speak of obstacles and difficulties to be encountered and overcome? In what good cause are not such to be expected? Has the cause of Foreign Missions fewer? Are there less serious difficulties to be apprehended, or less practical wisdom necessary, in the endeavor to evangelize the pagan nations of the earth, than to place the Christian church of America in its true position on the single subject of Slavery? Is there less demand for faith and confidence in God and the power of truth, when the "American and Foreign Christian Union" enters upon the work of converting the Papal nations of both hemispheres, than when we undertake to persuade the Christians of our land to remember them, that are in bonds, as bound with them?

But our present purpose is not so much to argue these points, as to invite your attention to one more effort, to combine the friends of Christ in some well-concerted and prayerful effort to "undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free." We believe that a prompt and hearty response would so give confidence to each other, reassure the hesitating, and decide the doubtful, that the way would be opened for future more vigorous and successful efforts. Further plans in detail might be given. But we prefer that they should be the result of the general deliberations of those who may identify themselves with this movement and connect themselves with this society. The *principles* of our "Declaration" being adopted heartily and in good faith, we can apprehend no serious difficulties in the way of marking out a line of policy which shall render them

effective for great and benign results. We start, indeed, without the *prestige* of names and numbers; but our confidence is in Him who hears the cry of the oppressed, and in the *claim* which Truth and Right can urge with success upon the reason and conscience of the wise and good. Our society is necessarily somewhat *local* in its origin, membership and officers; and yet we are not without our hopes, that its range shall yet become *national*, and that the reins of its management shall fall into the hands of those receiving them from a greatly enlarged constituency.

And here we rest our plea. We would respectfully and affectionately invite you to join us in one more effort to arouse the slumbering energies of the church to the performance of her duty. Shall our appeal be in vain? Shall past conflicts of opinion, or present hardly appreciable differences of sentiment upon the "metaphysics" of the subject, hinder us from combining our counsels, our prayers, and efforts, in behalf of an object confessedly so great and good? By the sorrows and "hopes deferred" of suffering millions, by our deep interest in the political prosperity of our nation, by our regard for the purity and honor of the church, by our love for the Saviour, who regards every act of kindness done to the least of his brethren as done to him, by our own hopes of heaven; and the welcome plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant," we invite you to be one with us in this effort in behalf of Humanity and our common Faith.

Signed, { J. C. WEBSTER, of Hopkinton, Mass., *Pres't.*
 { HENRY T. CHEEVER, of Jewett City, Conn., *Sec'y.*

Executive Committee:—Hon. Elmer Brigham, of Westboro; Rev. Samuel Hunt, of Franklin; I. Washburn, Charles Ballard and Rev Chester Field, of Worcester.

NOTE.—It will be perceived from the above Circular, that the vigorous prosecution of our proposed purposes and plans will require no small amount of pecuniary resources. Accordingly an "annual contribution" is made a condition of membership, the amount being left to the decision of each individual for himself. It is to be hoped, therefore, that each minister or member sympathizing with its objects, into whose hands it may fall, will interest himself at once in the organization of a society, in his church, according to the plan proposed in Art. I. of our Constitution. Any moneys from membership or donations, may be transmitted by mail, or otherwise, to the treasurer, I. Washburn, of Worcester, Mass., who will forward receipts for the same.





WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grannville, Pa.
Jan. Feb. 1969
W. O. W. B. B. B.

